

**What can the Derveni Papyrus tell us about the
religious milieu of the author?**

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Abstract

The discovery at Derveni in 1962 of the remains of a fourth-century BC papyrus, consisting largely of a philosophical commentary on a religious text, has provided a unique opportunity to investigate the religious milieu in which the author worked. This study concentrates neither on the author's philosophical views nor on the text on which he is commenting, but on the clues he gives to the religious practices and beliefs of himself and his audience. It discusses the evidence it provides for the rites they practised, and for the role of the beings, the daimons, Erinyes, Eumenides and souls, to which he refers. It also examines the role of the magi who conduct the rites, concluding that they are private religious practitioners who are Greek rather than Persian, regarded positively rather than negatively, and that the author himself was one. In relation to recent scholarly debate on the nature of Orphism, this study shows that there is little evidence in the papyrus or elsewhere for the existence of a contemporary Orphic cult linked with the gold leaves found in tombs, the later Orphic theogonies, and a doctrine of the primal guilt of humanity. In conclusion, a link is made with Pythagorean ideas to characterise what is described in the papyrus as essentially a private initiation cult.

16283 words

1

Introduction

In January 1962, road works about 10 kilometres north of Thessaloniki, close to the mountain pass of Derveni, uncovered a group of graves from the end of the fourth century BC, possibly forming an outlying cemetery of the ancient city of Lete. Among the many objects found there were a number, such as spear-heads and greaves, with military associations, as well as (in Tomb B) the Derveni Krater, a bronze crater richly decorated with scenes of Dionysus. Also found, among the debris of the funeral pyre covering Tomb A, was a partially carbonised papyrus roll, clearly intended to have been burnt with the corpse, but having perhaps fallen off the pyre. Following a difficult process of conservation and a prolonged process of editing, the *editio maior* was

finally published in 2006.¹ It was the first papyrus to be discovered on the Greek mainland, and the oldest anywhere.²

The surviving text consists of 26 columns, all damaged and incomplete. Its contents can be divided into three parts. (1) Columns I-VI and XX discuss various religious practices in which the reader, and perhaps the author, of the text might be expected to take part. (2) Embedded in the other columns are about twenty-four quotations from and allusions to an old work of theogony in hexametric verse, apparently ascribed to Orpheus.³ (3) Finally, the bulk of the text in these columns is a commentary on this theogony by the Derveni author, in which he interprets it as an allegory of a kind of pre-Socratic physics. His work appears to date to the late fifth century; the

¹ Kouremenos, Parássoglou and Tsantsanoglou 2006, hereafter abbreviated to KPT. The text and translation are by Parássoglou and Tsantsanoglou and the commentary by Kouremenos. I use their text throughout except where noted. I omit KPT's sublinear dots, which do not follow normal papyrological convention; see Janko 2006 and the linked editors' response. There are earlier, reasonably good, texts in Janko 2002, Jourdan 2003 and Betegh 2004. Janko 2008 suggests improved readings of the earlier part.

² The following account is based on that of Tsantsanoglou in KPT: 1-19. See also Funghi 1997 and Betegh 2004:56-73.

³ Collected in KPT: 21; see also Betegh 2004: 96-7, 103-5. The version in West 1983: 114-15 is very speculative. The references to Orpheus as presumed author are in XVIII.2,6.

theogony itself is significantly older. We do not know the identity either of the actual author of the theogony or of the Derveni author himself.

My concern in this study will be with what we can deduce about the religious milieu in which the author worked. Accordingly, I shall not be dealing at all with part (3), which properly belongs with the study of pre-Socratic physical theories. Part (2), the Orphic theogony, I shall also omit. Although it would indeed be very relevant to consider the mythological underpinnings of the religious practices described, the reconstruction of the theogony is a large and much-debated subject which I lack the space to deal with here.⁴ I shall therefore restrict myself to part (1), the topics covered in the first six columns and column XX.

One point connected with the theogony may, however, be relevant here. It is commonly assumed that it must have been an early version of another

⁴ West 1983: 68-115 is the most elaborate attempt; see the critical comments of Brisson 1985: 415-20. For other versions see Bernabé 2003: 31-48, Betegh 2004: 92-181 and the editions of Jourdan 2003 and KPT. There is still much disagreement.

Orphic theogony generally called the Rhapsodic theogony. This possibly dates to the first or second centuries AD, but is only known to us through quotations and references in Proclus and the later Neoplatonists.⁵ ‘This poem [the Derveni theogony]’, suggests Kouremenos, ‘seems to have been a very condensed, partial “summary” of the *Orphic Rhapsodies*’.⁶ The underlying assumption seems to be that as they are both ascribed to Orpheus they must be essentially the same.⁷ I think that this approach is insufficiently supported by the evidence and methodologically unjustified, and I shall suggest, in my arguments in Chapters 4 and 6, that the use without sufficient warrant of much later ideas has also affected the interpretation of other parts of the Derveni text.

This raises a wider question concerning the nature of Orphism. Clearly, religious practices supported by a text ascribed to Orpheus may be called Orphic in some sense, but how far Orphism may have constituted a unified

⁵ For the various Orphic theogonies, see West 1983, Bernabé 2003:23-4, Betegh 2004:140-52, Bernabé 2007a: 129.

⁶ KPT: 24; see also e.g. Rusten 1985:122, Brisson 2003: 19. Where there is a discrepancy between the Derveni account and the *Rhapsodies*, West assumes the Derveni author must have misread; West 1983: 88.

⁷ For criticisms of this assumption see Brisson 1997: 149-50, Betegh 2004: 92-4, Torjussen 2005: 12.

and continuing sect, cult or religion continues to be much debated. We can distinguish two broad approaches: a maximalist approach that assumes that everything ascribed to or linked with Orpheus or Orphism must be connected, and tries to reconstruct a unifying system to reconcile them all, and a minimalist approach, which I follow here, that only admits a connection if there is clear evidence for it.⁸ I shall return to this topic below in Chapter 6, where I hope to contribute to the debate by showing that there is no evidence that the Derveni Papyrus was linked to any kind of Orphic sect. In the meantime, I have tried to avoid using the term 'Orphic' for the religious practices I am discussing to avoid any presuppositions of this nature.

In what follows, I want first to discuss the evidence the papyrus provides for particular religious practices and beliefs, in order to build up an initial picture of the kind of religious milieu that we are dealing with. The references to daimons, souls, Erinyes and Eumenides will be considered separately, as their nature and interrelation, though difficult to determine, will be

⁸ Graf and Johnston 2013: 50-65 is a good initial survey; I give further references in Chapter 6.

fundamental for deciding what kind of ritual is being described. I shall then look at what evidence there may be in the text for a concept of original sin, an idea often associated with Orphism, but, as I shall argue here, without foundation. This will lead on to an examination of the religious professionals involved, particularly those that are called magi, and the relation of the author himself to them. I shall then try to demonstrate how limited is the evidence for an Orphic sect here, before finally drawing my conclusions together into a characterisation of what I believe is being described, an initiation cult.

2

Ritual and belief

I should like to start by listing the evidence of the papyrus for the particular ritual practices and beliefs that it mentions. For each, I shall quote what is said, including variant readings, and use comparative evidence where possible to try and determine what it actually tells us. I shall also include topics that we might expect to find in an 'Orphic' context of which there is in fact little or no sign in our text, as negative evidence is also important. Finally I shall offer some preliminary speculations on what kind of ritual might be involved. These apparently disparate elements should come together to allow us to form a rough general picture of the religious milieu, which will act as a basis for the exploration of particular themes in more depth in later chapters.

(a) *Libations*

Libations in drops are poured for Zeus in every temple (χ]οαὶ σταγόσιν [χ]έον[ται // Δ[ιὸς κατὰ π]άντα να[όν, II.5-6), according to KPT. Alternatively, in Janko's very different reading, the libations are to the Erinyes (χ]οαὶ σταγόσιν Ἐρινύω[ν, III.4).⁹ The magi also pour water and milk on the sacrifices, from which they make libations (τοῖ<ς> δὲ // ἱεροῖ[ς] ἐπισπένδουσιν ὕ[δω]ρ καὶ γάλα, ἐξ ὧνπερ καὶ τὰς // χοὰς ποιοῦσι, VI.5-7).

Choai were chthonic libations poured on to the ground, not on to altars; they were also made to the deceased at the grave.¹⁰ They were normally just poured out, so the reference to drops is odd.¹¹ Wineless libations to lesser gods and heroes often preceded sacrifices to major gods.¹² Wineless libations to the Eumenides appear in Aeschylus (*Eu.* 107) and Sophocles (honey-water, *OC* 479-81).¹³ I am not competent to decide between the alternative readings of II on papyrological grounds, but it is difficult to

⁹ Janko 2008: 45.

¹⁰ Jourdan 2003 *ad* II; Betegh 2004: 76-7.

¹¹ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 102-3.

¹² Henrichs 1984: 258-9.

¹³ Jourdan 2003 *ad* VI.

understand the rationale for what is described in the KPT version. We might therefore conclude that we are dealing with libations to the Erinyes or Eumenides in both cases.

(b) *Cakes*

The magi also sacrifice many-knobbed cakes (πολυόμφαλα τὰ πόπανα // θύουσιν, VI.7-8). Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* II.22) mentions similar *popana* in the baskets used in the mysteries of Dionysus.¹⁴ Different types of cakes had different numbers of knobs.¹⁵ The Iranian *frasast* appears to have been similar, which has sometimes been taken as evidence that the magi were Persian, as discussed below.¹⁶ The Derveni author says the cakes were innumerable because the souls were innumerable (VI.8), but if the souls mean the dead, as one would suppose, there is hardly a one-to-one correspondence, so this seems just an unconvincing speculation on his part.

¹⁴ Jourdan 2003 *ad loc.*

¹⁵ Henrichs 1984: 260-1.

¹⁶ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 114-15.

(c) *Birds*

There is a puzzling reference to something birdlike in column VI: anyone sacrificing to the gods must first do something with something birdlike, perhaps sacrifice a bird (ὀ[ρ]νίθ[ε]ιον πρότερον, VI.11). KPT also find an earlier reference to burning something birdlike for, they suggest in a supplement, each daimon (δαίμοσι δ' ἑκάστο[ι]ς ὀρνιθειόν τι // καίειν, II.7-8), though Janko does not read ὀρνιθειόν here.¹⁷ Those who believe in an Orphic sect which does not shed blood (as in Theseus' taunt to Hippolytus, Euripides, *Hipp.* 952-3) have particular difficulty with this.¹⁸ It may actually be a description of the birdlike Erinyes or the winged psyche, or even bird-shaped cakes.¹⁹ We do not have enough context to know what this means.

(d) *Incantations*

Something is apparently fitted to music (ἐπέθηκε[ν] ὕμνους ἀρμ[ο]στο[ὺ]ς τῇ μουσ[ικ]ῇ, II.8). KPT suggest hymns; Janko, however, does not read this

¹⁷ Janko 2008: 45.

¹⁸ Betegh 2004: 77-8; Bernabé 2007b: 160.

¹⁹ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 103-4; Jourdan 2003 *ad* II; Betegh 2004: 77-8; KPT *ad loc*; Bernabé 2007b: 165-7.

line at all.²⁰ The magi seem to use incantations (ἐπ[ωιδή, VI.2) against the hindering daimons, though sacrificial victims (ἐν[τομα) is a possible alternative reading here.²¹ Hymns were certainly used, as the author quotes a few words from one in his commentary (ἐν τοῖς Ὑμνοῖς, XXII.11).²² Incantations and music were a recognised means of communicating with chthonic powers,²³ and Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 706d) attests to their use by Persian magi in connection with the possessed (τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους).²⁴ The evidence is scanty, but their use seems quite plausible.

(e) *Oracles*

The fifth column refers to consulting an oracle: χρη[στη]ριαζομ[... // χρησ[τ]ηριάζον[ται ... // αὐτοῖς πάρειμεν [εἰς τὸ μα]ντεῖον ἐπερ[ω]τήσ[οντες,] // τῶν μαντευομένων [ἐν]εκεν, εἰ θεμι..., V.2-5, translated by KPT as ‘... consult an oracle ... they consult an oracle ... for them we enter the oracle in order to ask, with regard to those seeking a divination, whether it is proper ...’. The

²⁰ Janko 2008: 45.

²¹ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 111.

²² Obbink 1997: 48-9.

²³ Johnston 1999: 111.

²⁴ Bernabé 2007b: 163-4.

text goes on to ask why they do not believe in the terrible things of Hades.

There are several issues of interpretation here. Is this a literal consultation, and if so who is consulting, on behalf of whom, and about what?

The most radical view is that of Janko, who believes this is not a literal consultation at all, but that the author is mocking those who do not believe in the terrors of Hades, which are incredible to his rational mind, and ironically offering to consult an oracle on their behalf about this.²⁵ This interpretation seems determined by Janko's preconceived view of the author as a sceptical and rationalist philosopher. I do not quite follow the logic of even a mocking offer to consult an oracle in this case, and I can see no support in the text for any suggestion of a derisive or sceptical attitude to this or to ritual practices in general, as distinct from particular practitioners of them. I think we must take it as a serious literal reference.

²⁵ Janko 2008: 38.

It is unlikely that the consultation is in fact about Hades and the after-life; there seem no other examples of oracles being asked such a question.²⁶ It is also unclear that 'we' are making the consultation on behalf of the real questioner, as KPT translate. *μαντευομένων* can be passive ('objects of consultation') rather than middle ('those consulting for themselves'), which is supported by the use of *ἔνεκεν*, 'on account of', rather than the expected *ὑπέρ* for 'on behalf of'; *αὐτοῖς πάριμεν* would then mean we accompany them to the consultation.²⁷ There is, however, no reason to suppose that the author does not include himself in the 'we' in question, though with so lacunose a text we cannot be absolutely sure of this. We can reasonably conclude that the author is part of a group who sometimes consult oracles, perhaps not very surprising.

(f) *Dreams*

Those who disbelieve in the terrors of Hades do so not knowing dreams or each of the other things (*οὐ γίνωσ[κοντες ἐ]νύπνια // οὐδε τῶν ἄλλων*

²⁶ Jourdan 2003 *ad loc.*; KPT *ad loc.*

²⁷ Janko 2001: 20n84; Jourdan 2003 *ad loc.*

πραγμάτων ἑκάστ[ον,], V.6-7). The other things (πραγμάτων) here may refer to tangible signs sent by the gods, such as natural phenomena.²⁸ It seems clear that the author is claiming to interpret dreams correctly, which is important evidence for his role. It is a plausible conjecture that he uses the same interpretive techniques as in his commentary on the theogony.²⁹

(g) *Secrecy*

There is no information in the papyrus as to whether the rites or doctrines are in any way secret, except possibly in relation to the theogony. This appears to be described³⁰ as θεμ[ι]τὰ, 'lawful' (VII.2), and ῥηθέντα, 'spoken' (VII.4), both interpreted by Tsantsanoglou as 'not secret'.³¹ This possible, but not conclusive; the meaning might be 'spoken to the initiates telling them what it is lawful they should do'.

²⁸ Jourdan 2003 *ad loc.*

²⁹ Most 1997: 120; Janko 2001: 19n82; Jourdan 2003 *ad loc.*

³⁰ Assuming ὅμνον VII.2 is correctly supplemented and refers to the theogony, both of which seem plausible.

³¹ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 118 and translation in KPT.

Shortly after this comes what appears to be a quotation of a familiar phrase:

“θύρας” γὰρ ἐπιθέ[σθαι] κελεύσας τοῖ[ς] // [”ὥσι]ν”, ‘telling them to set doors to their ears’ (VII.9-10). The phrase θύρας δ’ ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι, ‘set the doors, profane’, is quoted by a number of writers, including Plato (*Symp.* 218b),³² and has been thought to be the opening line of the theogony quoted here.³³ It does seem on the face of it to imply that what follows is secret,³⁴ though Brisson’s theory that the profane are those who hear or read the text but do not understand it properly, as opposed to the initiates who know its real meaning, is attractive.³⁵ We cannot be sure.

(h) *Living a pure and righteous life*

Orphics have often been seen as especially ethical. Detienne pictured them as wandering vegetarian subversives, quasi-monks.³⁶ Plato (*Laws* 782c) identified the Orphic life with vegetarianism and Herodotus (2.81) speaks of

³² Tsantsanoglou 1997: 124-8.

³³ KPT *ad loc.*

³⁴ Arguing for secrecy, Parker 1995: 489; against, Hussey 1999: 321.

³⁵ Brisson 2010:27-9.

³⁶ Detienne 1979: 71-2.

them forbidding burial in wool.³⁷ There are many references to Orphic rigour and purity, even in negative characterisations such as Theophrastus (*Char.* 16) or Theseus in Euripides (*Hipp.* 948-57).³⁸ Is there any sign of this in our text?

The answer is, very little. There are a couple of references to the unjust and justice (ἄδικοι, III.8, δίκης, IV.12),³⁹ but these lack context and could be reasonably referred to the *poine* which will be discussed below in Chapter 4. Those who neither learn nor believe are said to be overcome by *hamartia*, ‘error’, as well as pleasure (ἁμαρ<ί>ης // καὶ [τ]ῆς ἄλλης ἡδον[ῆ]ς νενικημέν[οι, V.8-9), but this sounds more like lack of understanding than of righteousness or purity. There is no support in the text for seeing those to whom it is addressed as being required to live a especially ethical life. We

³⁷ Linforth 1941: 38-50, 97-8.

³⁸ Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 185; Edmonds 2008: 28-30.

³⁹ Or in Janko’s alternative readings ἄδικοι, II.8,]αδικης[, IV.12; Janko 2008: 45, 48. KPT *ad loc* also see a reference to wrongdoing at III.5 ἐξώλεας, ‘utter destruction’, but I do not understand this.

might also note that the papyrus was found on the pyre of apparently a rich man and a warrior.⁴⁰

(i) *Written books and hieroi logoi*

According to Guthrie, 'The Orphic did nothing unless there was a warrant for it in his books'.⁴¹ Books were associated with Orpheus in a number of cults,⁴² and we may think of Demosthenes' depiction (18.259) of Aeschines assisting his mother as she performed the mystic rites, perhaps those of Sabazios, by reading from the books.⁴³ There is also the decree of Ptolemy (probably Ptolemy IV) ordering those who perform rites for Dionysus to hand in their sacred text (τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον) (*P. Berlin 11774*).⁴⁴

There is, however, no mention of books or anything written in our text, apart from the theogony itself. Even in this case, as a short work in verse, it may possibly have been oral and memorised. Was it a *hieros logos*? The term in

⁴⁰ Betegh 2004: 68-73.

⁴¹ Guthrie 1952: 202.

⁴² West 1983: 26-9.

⁴³ Henrichs 2003: 222-4.

⁴⁴ Obbink 1997: 47; Henrichs 2003: 227-31.

Herodotus seems to mean a sacred legend giving the basis for a religious observance;⁴⁵ Ptolemy must have been referring to something different, but it is not clear what. KPT find the associated verb ἱερ[ολογ]εῖται, not otherwise attested before Lucian, in VII.7, translating it as 'speaking mystically'.⁴⁶ Tsantsanoglou does believe the theogony had a liturgical role, citing column VII, ἱερουργεῖτο γὰρ // [τῇ] ποήσει, 'for a sacred rite was being performed through the poem' (VII.2-3), but, as can be seen, the key word ἱερουργεῖτο is his own supplement of το, so this does not have much authority.⁴⁷

I think we can certainly conclude that the theogony was a sacred text in some sense, in that it dealt authoritatively with sacred matters, but there is no evidence that it was used as part of a ritual, and it is not clear how it would be so employed.

⁴⁵ Henrich 2003: 238.

⁴⁶ See Tsantsanoglou 1997: 122-3, Henrichs 2003: 13-14 for discussion.

⁴⁷ KPT; Tsantsanoglou 1997: 119.

At this point, it might be useful to take stock and summarise what we have learnt so far about the ritual and beliefs of the author and his audience.

Libations are certainly made, and wineless ones, of a chthonic type (*choai*), apparently in drops, very possibly to the Erinyes or Eumenides, whose identity will be examined in the next chapter. Also offered are many-knobbed cakes. Something is connected with birds, but we do not know what. There seem to be hymns or incantations with music. Divine messages are received by the consultation of oracles and the interpretation of dreams and other signs. It is not clear how far all this is secret, or only to be understood by a privileged group. There is no sign of a requirement to lead an especially pure or righteous life, or of any dietary restrictions. Nor is there much evidence that written books played a part in the ritual.

Does all this refer to a single ritual, and if so of what type? There is little direct evidence of its purpose in the text. There is a reference to the terrors of Hades (Ἅιδου δεινὰ, V.6), not believed by those who do not know dreams and the other signs. Prayers and sacrifices are means of appeasement

(εὐ]χαὶ καὶ θυσ[ί]αι μ[ε]λ[ι]ίσσουσι τὰ[ς] ψυχάς,], VI.1), perhaps of the souls, as KPT conjecture in their supplement. The incantations (or sacrificial victims) are to move the hindering daimons (VI.2-3), as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

A number of suggestions have been put forward. Some see the first part of the text and the theogony as complementary *dromena* and *legomena* of a single ritual,⁴⁸ but as discussed above under *hieroi logoi*, there is little evidence for the use of the theogony in this way. It is possible to see magical practices in the attempts to bind the daimons,⁴⁹ but it is not clear if this really differs from the propitiation of a divine power. A necromantic ritual has been suggested,⁵⁰ or a purification from miasma.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Betegh 2004: 350.

⁴⁹ Betegh 2004: 357.

⁵⁰ Macías Otero 2007: 147-8.

⁵¹ Martín Hernández, in his thesis reported in Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 172n3.

The presence of the roll on a funeral pyre has of course suggested a context in funerary ritual. As noted above, *choai* are used in libations to the dead.⁵² This was initially supported by a reading of Tsantsanoglou in III.6, and it is interesting to compare the various readings proposed, as an illustration of the difficulties in transcribing the text. His first version was: δ]αίμονες οἱ κάτω[θεν το]ῦδε χοῦ, ‘*daimones* who under this soil’.⁵³ His second version in KPT is: δ]αίμονες οἱ κατὰ [γῆς ο]ὔδέκοτ[ε, ‘the daimons who are in the underworld never’. Janko, however, has (as III.5): δ]αίμονες, οἱ κατὰ [τοὺς μ]άγους, ‘the *daimones*, who according to the *magoi*’.⁵⁴ A difference in reading of a few letters (ῶδε χοῦ / ῶδέκοτ / άγους) can radically alter the meaning.⁵⁵ In any case *chou* would be difficult to take as the actual tomb in question, as Tsantsanoglou originally suggested, as it properly refers to a funeral mound, which this tomb was not.

⁵² Jourdan 2003 *ad* II; Betegh 2004: 76-7.

⁵³ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 94, 106; see also Laks 1997: 140.

⁵⁴ Janko 2008: 45.

⁵⁵ The photographs in KPT show that while the beginning of the line is clear, the middle portion is very faint.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the references cited above to the terrors of Hades and moving the hindering daimons (V.6 and VI.2-3) that the ritual has a concern for the fate of the soul after death. We need to look more closely at what our text says concerning the Erinyes and Eumenides, the daimons and the souls.

3

Daimons, Erinyes, Eumenides and souls

The opening columns of the papyrus make a number of references to daimons, Erinyes, Eumenides and *psuchai*, or souls; how far some or all of these groups might be identical is something we shall have to consider. The role of these beings, and their relation to each other, is not at first sight at all clear, but an understanding of this will be fundamental to our comprehension of the author's conceptual world.

I should like to examine the question in a systematic way. Firstly, I shall review what each of these four terms normally signified in ancient Greece, and for each collect all the references to them in the Derveni Papyrus. Then I shall briefly describe some of the theories that have been put forward to explain these references. Finally, I shall suggest what seem to me to be the

most plausible conclusions. This procedure will unfortunately entail a certain amount of referring back and forward for the reader, but I think it is necessary if we are to consider all the evidence and its interrelation.

There are thirteen possible references in the papyrus to daimons, Erinyes, Eumenides or souls. I have allotted a number to each. As Janko's readings of the first three columns⁵⁶ are very different from those of KPT, I give both versions, marked KPT and Janko respectively; the later columns, which are not disputed, are in the KPT version as usual.

Daimons

A daimon was some kind of divine being, but the term was used in a wide variety of ways.⁵⁷ It will be useful to examine a number of examples to get an idea of the range of meanings. In Homer, it can be used of the Olympian gods: Aphrodite leading Helen is described as a daimon (ἦρχε δὲ δαίμων, // 3.420). This use seems to have dropped away, but we still get in a fourth

⁵⁶ Janko 2008: 43-5.

⁵⁷ There is a short survey in Burkert 1985: 179-81.

century BC gold leaf 'the gods and other daimons' (θεοὶ καὶ δαίμονες ἄλλοι, A2.2).⁵⁸ In Hesiod, when the gold race of men was replaced by the silver, they were hidden in the ground to be guardians of mortal men as 'noble daimons of the earth' (δαίμονες ... ἐσθλοί, ἐπιχθόνιοι, *Op.* 122-23), so they are both beneficent and chthonic.⁵⁹ The Agathos Daimon ('good daimon') received cult; it took the form of a snake, again a chthonic association.⁶⁰

Plato In the *Symposium* has Diotima call Eros a daimon, defined as something between god and man (καὶ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξύ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ, 202e), with the function of carrying messages between the two; this concept of a messenger is later repeated by Plutarch and Porphyry.⁶¹ Pythagoreans believed they received direct communications from daimons, who sent signs of health and disease. (D.L. 8.1.32).⁶²

Empedocles seems to identify himself as an long-lived erring daimon,

⁵⁸ Macías Otero 2007: 155. For the gold leaves, I use the edition and numbering of Edmonds 2011; see the bibliography for references to other editions, unfortunately all with different systems of numbering.

⁵⁹ Macías Otero 2007: 149.

⁶⁰ Burkert 1985: 180.

⁶¹ Macías Otero 2007: 151-7.

⁶² KPT: 146; Burkert 1985: 180.

compelled to wander for three myriad seasons (fr. 107 Wright = DK31B115).⁶³ Xenocrates, taking a more scientific approach, believed them to be a kind of sublunary body (fr. 15 Heinze).⁶⁴ In the *Orphic rhapsodies* the demiurge is described as an 'illustrious daimon' (ἀριδείκετε δαίμον, OF239B = OF155K).⁶⁵ The only unifying idea behind these manifold uses seems to be that of a divine being who is not quite a god.

More interesting, and something that has been seen as relevant to our text, is the concept of a daimon for each person.⁶⁶ Heraclitus claims that man's character is his daimon (ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων, DK22B199), which seems to approach this idea, Pindar refers to a birth daimon (δαίμων γενέθλιος, *O.* 13.105), and there are many other references.⁶⁷ Where its function is specified it seems to be that of a tutelary guardian (φύλακα συμπέμπειν τοῦ βίου, Plato *Rep.* 620e1), but there are two references that may be especially significant. Menander calls it a mystagogue through life (μυσταγωγὸς τοῦ

⁶³ Seaford 1986: 2. *Contra* Tsantsanoglou 1997: 112, the wandering soul appears to be one of the daimons; Wright 1995 *ad loc.*

⁶⁴ Janko 1997: 68.

⁶⁵ Bernabé 2003: 161.

⁶⁶ Edmonds 2004: 190-1.

⁶⁷ KPT: 146.

βίου, fr. 550 Kock), the terminology suggesting a link with some kind of mystery religion, and Plato has the daimon continuing its guidance in the realm of the dead (τελευτήσαντα ἕκαστον ὁ ἑκάστου δαίμων ... ἄγειν ἐπιχειρεῖ εἰς δὴ τινα τόπον, *Phaedo* 107d6-7), though it should be noted that Plato's versions of myths are not necessarily reliable, as they are adapted to suit the philosophical points he wishes to make.⁶⁸

Daimon could be used of the dead, specifically those distinguished in life.⁶⁹

This is made explicit by Plato (ἐπειδὴν τις ἀγαθὸς τελευτήσῃ ... γίνεται δαίμων, 'whenever anyone good dies ... he becomes a daimon', *Cra.* 398b);

examples in literature include Phaethon (Hesiod, *Th.* 991), Ganymede (Theognis 1348), Darius (Aesch., *Pers.* 620) and Alcestis (Eur., *Alc.* 1003).

Again, however, Plato is not necessarily a guide to current general belief, and the literary examples suggest a kind of quasi-divinity, so this is some way from saying that dead souls normally become daimons.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of this myth, see Edmonds 2004: 159-220.

⁶⁹ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 100.

The daimons in the papyrus are described as ἐμποδών, 'hindering' (DA4, DA5), and it is worth asking if they can be connected with the mythical being known as Empousa, traditionally an apparition sent by Hecate, which may come from the same root.⁷⁰ The term according to Demosthenes was applied to Aeschines' mother (Dem. 18.130), perhaps because she jumped out and frightened people in a mystery rite,⁷¹ though this may be just a conjecture and the term only refer to her versatility (probably with a sexual overtone). Dionysus and Xanthias are confronted by a shape-changing Empousa on their trip to Hades (Ar., *Frogs* 288-96), and it seems plausible that this is some kind of comic equivalent of the hindering daimons of our text, here singular and female, but perhaps reflecting the same underlying idea.

To sum up, then, a daimon is a divine being other than a god, who may be, for example, an eminent person raised to a kind of divinity after death, a personal divine guardian, or indeed any other semi-divine being at all.

⁷⁰ Johnston 1999: 133-4.

⁷¹ Johnston 1999: 134n22.

Derveni references:

(DA1) II.7-8 KPT

δαίμοσι δ' ἑκάστο[ι]ς ὀρνίθειον τι // κα[ί]ειν.

[must] burn something birdlike to each daimon

As noted in the last chapter, this is not read by Janko, and the daimons are in any case a supplement. This is therefore of dubious value as evidence.

(DA2) III.4 KPT

[δαίμ]ων γίνετα[ι] ἑκά[σ]τῳ ἰατ[ρ]ός

to each is a daimon as a healer

The same reservations apply to this.

(DA3a) III.5-9 KPT

οἱ δὲ // δαίμονες οἱ κατὰ [γῆς ο]ὐδέκοτ[ε] τηροῦσι, // θεῶν

ὑπηρέται δ' [εἰσ]ὶ πάντας υ[-ο]ι // εἰσιν ὅπωςπερ ἄνδρες] ἄδικοι υ. [

]νοι, // αἰτίην [τ' ἔ]χουσι

the daimons under the earth never observe ... but are servants of the gods all ... just as unjust men ... have responsibility

(DA3b) III.4-8 Janko

οἱ δὲ // δ]αίμονες, οἳ κατὰ [τοὺς μ]άγους τιμὰς [τ]ηροῦσι [τῶν] [// θεῶν,
 ὑπηρεταὶ δ[ίκης ..]. ἑκάστοις ορ[..... ..]ι // εἰσιν, ὅπωςπερ α[....
 ..(.).οστο[.]στο[.....]νοι // αἰτίην [δ' ἔ]χουσι

But the *daimones*, who according to the *magoi* observe the honours of the gods, are servants of justice ... for every (*plural noun missing*) ..., just as ... (*plural participle missing*). But they are responsible ... (Janko's translation)

Although the letters read in the two versions are not too different, the meaning is. Both agree that the daimons are servants, but whether of the gods or of Justice depends on how the text is punctuated and supplemented. Note that the preceding sentence (ER3) ends with a certain reference to the Erinyes, so the δὲ ('but') might seem to imply a contrast with them; the Erinyes, however, are there in the genitive (Ἐρινύων), so the contrast is probably rather with the subject of that sentence, whatever that might have been.

(DA4) VI.2-3

ἐπ[ωιδῇ] δ]ὲ μάγων δύν[α]ται δαίμονας ἐμ[ποδῶν] // γι[νομένο]υς
 μεθιστάναι

the incantation of the magi can remove (or change) the daimons who are hindering

As noted in the previous chapter ἔν[τομα, 'sacrificial victims', is a possible alternative to incantations.⁷² I shall discuss the meaning of μεθιστάναι below.

(DA5) VI.3-4

δαίμονες ἐμπο[δῶν δ' εἰσὶ] // ψ[υχαῖς ἐχθ]ροί
hindering daimons are hostile souls

Alternative supplements to ἐχθροί, 'hostile', are φρουροί or τιμωροί, 'guardian' or 'avenging'.⁷³

Erinyes

The characteristic role of the Erinyes is in the punishment of crimes, especially murder, within the blood kin group. There are half a dozen instances in Homer, and they are familiar in this role in tragedy, most notably

⁷² Tsantsanoglou 1997: 111.

⁷³ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 113; KPT *ad loc.*

in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus and other versions of the Orestes story.⁷⁴ They are sometimes depicted as maenads or bacchants.⁷⁵

It is important to note, however, that although this may have been their primary function, there were aspects of the Erinyes not connected to family vengeance. They are invoked against oath-breakers (Homer, *Il.* 3.276-80, 19.258-60, Hesiod, *Op.* 803-4, Alcaeus, fr.129).⁷⁶ They silence the talking horse Xanthus who is prophesying Achilles' death (*Il.* 19.418); as talking horses were common in epic, probably they were objecting not to this but to the prophecy.⁷⁷ They kill children, and are associated with the *aorai*, girls who die prematurely.⁷⁸ A comparison has been made with the Iranian *Fravashis*, female spirits who punished threats to the natural order and haunted sinful souls.⁷⁹ Heraclitus, as we shall see (DK22B29 quoted in IV.7-9) called them helpers of Justice who prevent the sun exceeding its limits; whatever he meant by this, it cannot have been crime within the blood kin. I

⁷⁴ Johnston 1999: 251-8.

⁷⁵ Johnston 1999: 253-5; Betegh 2004: 86.

⁷⁶ Johnston 1999: 252, 257.

⁷⁷ Johnston 1999: 265; Edwards 1991 *ad loc.*

⁷⁸ Johnston 1999: 261-3, who suggests a connection with leaving the blood kin group.

⁷⁹ Tsantsanoglou 1999: 113; see also Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 221-2.

shall return later (Chapter 7) to a Pythagorean belief that the Erinyes fettered impure souls in unbreakable bonds (D.L. 8.1.31).⁸⁰

It is not clear that they were ever actually identified with the dead.⁸¹ Rohde believed that the Erinys was originally the soul of the murdered man, later replaced by the concept of a supernatural being, but this is a conjecture on his part.⁸² In *Seven against Thebes*, the Erinys of Oedipus has been thought to be his ghost (Aesch., *Sept.* 885-6, 976-7), but, apart from the problem of the ghost of a male becoming a female spirit,⁸³ in a play concerned with the effects of conflict between brothers the Erinys can be plausibly taken as a blood kin avenger attached to their father.

Derveni references:

(ER1) I.6 KPT

Ἐρινύων

of the Erinyes

⁸⁰ Tsantsanoglou 1999:112.

⁸¹ Johnston 1999: 274.

⁸² Rohde 1925: 178-80.

⁸³ Johnston 1999: 274.

(ER2) II.3 KPT = III.2 Janko

Ἐριν[υ

Erinyes

Neither of these have any useful context.

(ER3a) III.4-5 KPT

ή // [γὰρ Δί]κη ἐξώλεας [νουθ]ετεί δι' ἐκά[στης τῶν] Ἐρινύω[v.

for Justice chastises pernicious men through each of the Erinyes

(ER3b) III.3-4 Janko

τιμῶσιν [.(.)ιρηλ[....(.)]ρη // τοὺς ἤδη ἐξώλεας [....(.)]χοαὶ σταγόσιν
Ἐρινύω[v,

libations in drops to the Erinyes honour (*word missing*) those people
who are already annihilated (Janko's translation)

These are different readings of the same text. ἐξώλεας, literally 'annihilated',

is also commonly used to mean 'pernicious' (*LSJ s.v.*).

(ER4) IV.7-9

“ἥλι[ος ...].ου κατὰ φύσιν ἀνθρω[πτηίου] εὖρος ποδός [ἐστι,] // τὸ
μ[έγεθος] οὐχ ὑπερβάλλων εἰκ[οτας οὖ]ρους ε[ὔρους] // ἐοὔ· εἰ δὲ μ]ή,
Ἐρινύε[ς] νιν ἐξευρήσου[σι, Δίκης ἐπίκουροι.]

“The sun is by nature a human foot wide, not exceeding the appropriate limits of its width; if not, the Erinyes, helpers of Justice, will discover it

This is given as a quotation from Heraclitus (IV.5), a form of which is known from elsewhere (= DK22B3+29).

Eumenides

The Eumenides, or Semnai Theai, unlike the Erinyes,⁸⁴ received cult. They were connected with agrarian fertility, human reproduction, heroes, Zeus Meilichios, and the world of the dead.⁸⁵ Aeschylus has the Erinyes transformed into the Eumenides in his play of that name, and the identification has been accepted as a given by many modern scholars such as Rohde.⁸⁶ This identification seems to appear in literature, rather than the cult itself,⁸⁷ but it is plausible to suppose that the Eumenides were the cult equivalent of the Erinyes;⁸⁸ certainly the equation must have been one that

⁸⁴ For possible exceptions see Johnston 1999: 270.

⁸⁵ Henrichs 1984: 263.

⁸⁶ E.g. Rohde 1925: 178.

⁸⁷ Henrichs 1984: 264.

⁸⁸ Johnston 1999: 272-3.

was generally familiar. Plato in the *Laws* (927a-b) describes the souls of the dead as possibly 'kindly', εὐμενεῖς, which Janko sees as identifying them with the Eumenides,⁸⁹ but this is perhaps putting too much stress on a single word.

Derveni references:

(EU1) II.6-7 KPT

ἔτι δ' ἐξαιρέ]τους τιμὰς [χ]ρῆ // τ[ῇ] Εὐμεν]ίδι νείμ[αι,

also must allot exceptional honours to the Eumenides.

This is not read by Janko, and depends heavily on supplements, so must be rather dubious.

(EU2) VI.8-10

μύσται // Εὐμενίσι προθύουσι κ[ατὰ τὰ] αὐτὰ μάγοις· Εὐμενίδες γὰρ // ψυχαί εἰσιν.

initiates make a preliminary sacrifice to the Eumenides in the same way as the magi, for the Eumenides are souls

⁸⁹ Janko 2008: 46.

Souls

ψυχή is conventionally translated ‘soul’, and I retain that convention here, with the qualification that many of the modern associations of that word are lacking. The word in Homer means ‘ghost’ or ‘spirit of the dead’ (*LSJ s.v.*), as, for example, throughout *Odyssey* 11. The meanings ‘immortal part of the self’ and ‘personality’ do not seem to appear before Pindar, and were mostly used in philosophical discussion; in normal usage the word still referred to the dead.⁹⁰ They are of an infinite number (μυρία νεκρῶν, ‘myriads of dead’, *Od.* 11.632), and move in swarms.⁹¹ They were identified with the stars in the Milky Way⁹² and the motes in a sunbeam.⁹³

The Orphics, according to Aristotle, believed that the soul was borne on the wind and entered the body through breathing (φησὶ γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου εἰσιέναι ἀναπνεόντων, φερομένην ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνέμων, *De anima* 410b27 =

⁹⁰ *LSJ s.v.*; Henrichs 1984: 262.

⁹¹ Henrichs 1984: 262.

⁹² KPT *ad* VI.8.

⁹³ Janko 2001: 20n94.

OF421B = OF27K).⁹⁴ Diogenes Laertius reports that the Persian magi believed that εἰδώλων πλήρη εἶναι τὸν ἀέρα, ‘the air is full of *eidola*’ (D.L. 1.prologue.7), which enter through the eyes, where *eidola* may mean ‘shapes’ or may mean ‘ghosts of the dead’.⁹⁵ Euripides (fr. 912 Kannicht) refers to the souls of the dead (ψυχὰς ἐνέρων) being sent to the light to show the causes of evil and to whom to sacrifice.⁹⁶

Derveni references:

(PS1) VI.1

εὐ[χαὶ καὶ θυς[ί]αι μ[ε]ιλ[ί]ισσουσι τὰ[ς ψυχὰς,]
prayers and sacrifices appease the souls

This depends on a supplement, and so is doubtful.

(PS2 = DA5) VI.3-4

δαίμονες ἐμ[ποδὼν δ’ εἰσὶ] // ψ[υχαῖς ἐχθ]ροί
hindering daimons are hostile souls

⁹⁴ Linforth 1941: 151; Bernabé 2003: 228-9.

⁹⁵ Betegh 2004: 79.

⁹⁶ Macías Otero 2007: 146-7.

(PS3) VI.7-8

ἀνάριθμα [κα]ῖ πολυόμφαλα τὰ πόπανα // θύουσιν, ὅτι καὶ αἱ ψυχαῖ
ἀν]άριθμοι εἰσι.

numberless and many-knobbed are the cakes they sacrifice, because
the souls are numberless

(PS4 = (part of) EU2) VI.9-10

Εὐμενίδες γὰρ // ψυχαί εἰσιν.

for the Eumenides are souls

To sum up the results of our investigation so far, if we discount doubtful readings, we are left with only seven references, some with disputed readings: DA3, DA4, DA5 (= PS2), ER3, ER4, EU2 (=PS4), PS3. This is a limited body of evidence to try to interpret coherently, so it may be useful to start by examining how it has been previously viewed by the four scholars who have examined the matter most closely.

Tsantsanoglou

Tsantsanoglou was the first to be able to consider the first six columns, in his own reading, in the form of commentary on the relevant columns.⁹⁷ The souls, he says, are the dead, which include the Erinyes and Eumenides, who seem to be the same. The Erinyes are the souls of the righteous, as are the daimons; presumably he means the daimons are another name for the Erinyes. The righteous are here identified with the initiates, by an extension from the evidence, quoted above, of distinguished persons like Alcestis becoming daimons after death. Honours are paid to the Erinyes/Eumenides in the form of libations, bird sacrifice and hymns, which therefore leads us to the conclusion, which he does not draw explicitly, that the initiates themselves will receive cult after death. The hindering daimons are like the Iranian Fravashis and hinder sinful souls, though it is not clear from what. Justice punishes the unrighteous in some way. As shown by ἐκάστωι in DA2, everyone has a personal daimon; he does not explain how this might relate to his explanation of daimons as souls of the initiates.

⁹⁷ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 96-113.

Johnston

Johnston considers these columns in her study of the relations between the dead and the living in ancient Greece.⁹⁸ The souls are again the dead, who might easily have been referred to as daimons, and the Eumenides are specifically identified as souls. The Erinyes, however, are different, the traditional avenging spirits, either functioning like the hindering daimons or punishing the unjust. They are therefore not the same as the Eumenides. The hindering daimons are transformed (μεθιστάναι, DA4) into Eumenides. It is peculiar, she admits, for dead souls to become deities, so she suggests this must be some idiosyncratic idea of the Derveni author.

Betegh

Betegh has produced the only full-length monograph on the papyrus. His conclusions on the first columns are, perhaps understandably with so disputed a text, tentative.⁹⁹ The souls, daimons, Erinyes and Eumenides, he believes, are all groups of the dead. It appears that the daimons are a sub-

⁹⁸ Johnston 1999: 276-9.

⁹⁹ Betegh 2004: 85-9.

group of the dead, though I am not clear how or why this sub-group is supposed to be constituted. Cautiously following Tsantsanoglou, he thinks that the Erinyes are the souls of the righteous, or initiates, referring to their association with maenads in tragedy. They are probably the same as the Eumenides and are a functional sub-group of the daimons, presumably the same as the hindering daimons, and play a not clearly specified part in funerary or initiatory ritual. The daimons may also be allotted to each individual, and may also receive the souls into the netherworld; again, he does not say how this might relate to their other functions.

Janko

Janko takes a radically different view, based in part on his own readings of the papyrus.¹⁰⁰ That the daimons are servants of the gods or of Justice is, he believes, just the opinion of the magi, Persian or Greek, whom the author is attacking (DA3b). The libations people make to the Erinyes, as vengeful agents of the dead, are mistaken, as they do not exist; instead, they are

¹⁰⁰ Janko 2008: 45-6.

placating the angry dead (ἐξώλεας, ER3b) directly. The daimons, Erinyes and Eumenides are all the same, but on the Derveni author's rationalist view, Janko maintains, none of them exist. It might be observed that there are limits to the author's rationalism in this interpretation, if he cannot believe in the Erinyes but can believe in angry souls of the dead bent on vengeance.

Conclusions

I think we may cautiously deduce the following:

- (1) *The souls referred to are the dead.*

As has been made clear, this is the normal usage of ψυχή, and ἀνάρητοι in PS3 makes it fairly certain, as the dead are characteristically numberless.

- (2) *The Eumenides are also the dead, and are the same as the Erinyes.*

EU2 is explicit that the Eumenides are souls, and therefore the dead. I have shown that they were often equated with the Erinyes, and though it might be possible to refer to just one group without making the connection with the

other, there seems to be no case where the two are mentioned together but somehow distinguished as separate beings.

(3) *The Erinyes are the same as the hindering daimons.*

This is less certain, but seems likely. Firstly, both groups seem to be described as servants of Justice, the Erinyes in the quotation from Heraclitus (ER4), and the daimons in DA3b (at least servants of some god in the alternative DA3a). Secondly, it is difficult to believe that there were two separate groups of hostile or avenging beings (ἐμποδῶν, ἐχθροί, τιμωροί).

(4) *The Erinyes need to be appeased by sacrifices and incantations.*

The initiate sacrifices to the Eumenides (EU2), and the incantations or sacrifices of the magi remove or change (μεθιστάναι) the hindering daimons (DA4), while prayers and sacrifices appease the souls (PS1); as we have seen, these seem to be different terms for the same beings. Whether μεθιστάναι means 'physically remove', or 'change the nature of', 'make

favourable', does not matter, as the idea in either case is that of appeasement.¹⁰¹

(5) *There is a concern for justice and the punishment of the unjust.*

Unfortunately, the references are all uncertain. ἄνδρες ἄδικοι, 'unjust men', in DA3a is a disputed reading, as is ὑπηρέται δίκης, 'servants of justice', in DA3b, while Δίκης ἐπίκουροι, 'helpers of Justice', in ER4 is in a quotation. I am not, however, convinced by Janko's theory that ἐξώλεας in ER3 refers to the dead (as 'the annihilated') and prefer KPT's translation as 'pernicious men'. On balance, it does seem as if justice and the punishment of the unjust are involved in some respect, but there is no clear context for this.

(6) *The Erinyes were probably not the souls of initiates.*

The evidence for this is negative. There is no direct evidence for it. As I have tried to indicate above, the cases of eminent dead being referred to as daimons cover only exceptional cases, like Ganymede and Alcestis, which

¹⁰¹ Bernabé 2008: 257-60; Jourdan 2003 *ad VI.3*.

might perhaps be called semi-deification, and do not sound much like becoming an Erinyes. I think this must be differentiated from the blessed state that might be obtained by initiates. It might also be questioned whether the initiates would sacrifice to or try to appease their deceased fellows (conclusion (4) above). It is true that we have already concluded that the Erinyes and the daimons were dead of some kind, but the identification with the initiates is no more than an unsupported guess.

(7) *The daimons were not the personal daimons of living individuals.*

The only evidence for this is ἐκάστῳ in DA2, a supplement in a dubious reading, and it is difficult to see how it could be made to fit in with their role as Erinyes, unless we are to assume that there is an avenging fury for each mortal. As we saw, daimon can be used of almost any quasi-divine being, and I do not think there is any connection here.

We have therefore assembled a picture of vengeful and hindering souls of the dead, also known as daimons, Erinyes and Eumenides, who seem

concerned for justice and the punishment of the unjust, and need to be appeased with incantations and sacrifices. This is unexpected in two ways.

First, as Johnston points out, the Erinyes seem otherwise always to be thought of as agents of the dead, not the dead souls themselves.¹⁰² Second, there is no trace of their traditional association with crimes in the blood kin group.

We might seem to have raised more questions than we have provided answers. What exactly are these beings doing, and why? I shall look at a possible answer in the next chapter.

¹⁰² Johnston 1999: 274.

4

Original sin

Original sin is usually thought of as a characteristically Christian concept, unknown in the ancient world before the Christian era. The claim has nevertheless been made, however, that there was in fact an ancient equivalent to original sin in a myth of the Orphics, and at least one scholar has claimed that this is represented in the Derveni Papyrus. The whole question is linked to the debate on the nature of Orphism that I shall discuss more fully in Chapter 6.¹⁰³ If this contention is true, it would reveal the main motive force behind the religious practices described in our text, and therefore requires careful investigation.

The argument turns on a single word in the account of the magi performing incantations to drive away the hindering daimons: 'The magi make the

¹⁰³ There is an illuminating sceptical discussion in Edmonds 1999; for a different point of view see Graf and Johnston 2013: 50-65.

sacrifice for this reason, just as if paying a penalty' (τὴν θυσ[ί]αν τούτου ἔνεκε[ν] π[ροιοῦσ]ι[ν] // οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὥσπερ εἰ ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες, VI.4-5). The word ποινή, 'penalty', has been seen as connecting to a whole body of Orphic myth. The same word appears, as we shall see, in the funerary gold leaves, in the Gurôb Papyrus and in a much-discussed fragment of Pindar.¹⁰⁴ It has been linked to the crime of the Titans and the guilt of the human race: 'Rien n'empêche', says Bernabé of this passage, 'qu'il fasse référence ici à la faute titanesque originelle, à la lumière de beaucoup d'autres textes présentant la même expression ou des expressions très proches, aussi dans un contexte orphique'.¹⁰⁵ To test the truth of this assertion we must leave the Derveni Papyrus for a while to examine a range of other roughly contemporary sources.

The myth in question is best known from the *Rhapsodic theogony* attributed to Orpheus, of which we have extensive quotations in the later Neoplatonists,

¹⁰⁴ The connection is drawn by e.g. Parker 1995: 496, Most 1997: 131-2.

¹⁰⁵ Bernabé 2007b: 162.

especially Proclus and Damascius.¹⁰⁶ This theogony seems to date from the first or second centuries AD and to be based on earlier Orphic poems now lost.¹⁰⁷ Although it contains much of which there is little or no trace in the Derveni theogony, it is often assumed that the two were simply different accounts of the same story, on the grounds that both claim the authorship of Orpheus, and that the apparent differences are due to the fragmentary state of the Derveni text. 'The events of the Derveni Theogony', says Rusten, '... can be assumed to be largely identical with those in the later poem ascribed to Orpheus (called the *Rhapsodies*).'¹⁰⁸ I shall not make this assumption.

The myth is as follows.¹⁰⁹ Zeus was succeeded as ruler in Olympus by Dionysus, his son by Persephone. The Titans, incited by Hera, decoyed him with toys (clearly he was still quite young at the time) and killed him. There are various versions of what happened to his different members, but,

¹⁰⁶ For reconstructions see West 1983: 70-5, 227-58; Bernabé 2003: 107-214.

¹⁰⁷ West 1983: 246-7; Bernabé 2003: 109.

¹⁰⁸ Rusten 1985: 122; for similar views see West 1983: 86-7, Brisson 2003: 19, KPT: 24.

¹⁰⁹ Summarised in Guthrie 1952: 82-3; fuller versions in Graf and Johnston 2013: 66-93, and with extracts from the *Rhapsodies* (in Spanish translation) in Bernabé 2003: 182-202; critical discussion in Linforth 1941: 307-64.

according to one, the Titans boiled, roast and ate him.¹¹⁰ Zeus, however, destroyed the Titans with his thunderbolt and restored Dionysus to life.

A significant contribution to our interpretation of the myth was made by the sixth century AD Alexandrian Neoplatonist Olympiodorus.¹¹¹ Mankind, he said (*In Phaed.* 1.3-6), was created from the ashes of the Titans. We have therefore inherited not only something of their guilt but also something of the divinity of Dionysus, as he was inside them. It is not clear how far this was an Orphic doctrine and how far an original idea of Olympiodorus.¹¹² He seems to have been influenced by contemporary alchemical ideas.¹¹³ I think it is also significant that he was a pagan in what was by then a mainly Christian world,¹¹⁴ and might easily have been unconsciously adopting Christian concepts. In any event, the idea that mankind inherited the guilt of the Titans has been seen by modern commentators as the cardinal myth of

¹¹⁰ For the significance of the cooking process, see Detienne 1979: 68-94.

¹¹¹ Fullest treatment in Brisson 1992; Edmonds 1999 is a major critical reassessment.

¹¹² Linforth 1941: 331-2; Edmonds 1999: 40-2.

¹¹³ Brisson 1992: 492-4.

¹¹⁴ Brisson 1992: 481.

Orphism, and the ancient equivalent of the Christian doctrine of original sin.¹¹⁵

What we have to decide is how far this notion of an ancient guilt inherited from the Titans, for which mankind needs to pay a penalty, was in some way current at the time the Derveni author wrote, and might therefore lie behind the rites to which he alludes and the ποινή to be paid in VI.5.

The notion of the Titanic origin of man is attested in several sources.¹¹⁶ In the *Homeric hymn to Apollo* they are the ancestors of men and gods (Τιτῆνές ... τῶν ἑξ ἄνδρες τε θεοί τε, 335-6). There are a number of other references, generally much later. Oppian (*Halieutica* 5.9-10) suggests that man, if not created by Prometheus, may be born from the blood of the Titans. The Orphic *Hymn to the Titans* has them ancestors of all living animals, including man. In these examples, however, the descent is not peculiar to man, as gods or other animals may be included, and it is not linked with the crime and

¹¹⁵ Alderink 1981: 13-15; Edmonds 1999.

¹¹⁶ The following references, with others, are collected by Linforth 1941: 331-4.

guilt of the Titans and their blasting by the thunderbolt. Indeed, the Titans can even be praised in a hymn.

As there is no direct contemporary evidence for the guilt inherited from the Titans, scholars have had to fall back on indirect allusions. The most important is a fragment of Pindar preserved by Plato (fr. 133 = *Meno* 81b-c).

οἷσι δὲ Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος δέξεται, 'those from whom Persephone receives the penalty of ancient grief', she restores to the sunlight after nine years and they become kings and heroes. This has been the subject of an ingenious analysis by Rose.¹¹⁷ The grief referred to, he argues,¹¹⁸ cannot be the souls', as they would not pay a penalty for their own grief, so must be Persephone's. As gods cannot be grieved by mortal actions, it must be caused by a god. It cannot be caused by her rape by Hades, as humans have no responsibility for this. The only other divine crime known that could be relevant is the killing of her son Dionysus by the Titans, so this must have caused the grief. But if human souls have to pay

¹¹⁷ Rose 1936; see also Linforth 1941: 345-50 and Rose 1943.

¹¹⁸ Rose 1936: 84-8.

the penalty for it, Pindar must have known of the Titans eating Dionysus and man springing from their ashes, as otherwise they would have had no guilt.

Rose's arguments have been generally accepted,¹¹⁹ but there are a number of difficulties. His conclusion depends on a long chain of reasoning, even if each individual step seems plausible. It is strange that Persephone is still exacting retribution from mankind. The actual perpetrators of the crime were punished at the time, which ought to have settled the matter, and the victim himself seems to bear no grudge against humanity. I also find it difficult to believe that the expression 'ancient grief' is used of something fairly temporary rather than something continuing. Dionysus was quickly restored to life again, so the grief was in effect cancelled out.

In any case, 'penalty of grief' does not mean 'penalty for crime' in normal parlance, though of course Pindar was a poet, and may have been stretching

¹¹⁹ E.g. by Burkert 1985: 298, Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 72, Graf and Johnston 2013: 68-9.

the language.¹²⁰ It would be more natural to take the grief as being the penalty, and, in a context that clearly refers to reincarnation, to the pains of the cycle of birth and rebirth.¹²¹ We can compare Empedocles (fr. 107 Wright = DK31B115) who by an ancient (παλαιόν) decree exchanges one hard path of life for another (ἀργαλέας βίοτοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους), and the fourth century BC gold leaf (A1) where the soul who comes to Persephone (χθονίων βασίλεα) has flown out of the hard circle of heavy grief (κύκλου δ' ἐξέπταν βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο), usually thought to refer to the cycle of reincarnation.¹²² There are suggestive links in vocabulary (ἀργαλέος, παλαιός, πένθος) between Pindar, Empedocles and the gold leaf, as well as the reference to Persephone. Both παλαιός and πένθος are here linked with reincarnation, and ποινή would then correspond to ἀργαλέος in the sense that both refer to the harshness and difficulty of the experience.

¹²⁰ The genitive for the offence after ποινή would be normal (*LSJ* s.v.), but the use of πένθος for the cause of grief would not, despite *LSJ*'s citation of *Pi. l.7.37*, where the meaning 'grief' makes perfect sense. I am suggesting an appositional genitive; Smyth 1956 §1322; Linforth 1941: 347.

¹²¹ Linforth 1941:347; see also Seaford 1986: 7-8, who suggests the reincarnated ones are the Titans themselves, for which there is no evidence.

¹²² Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 117-121.

A number of other sources have been put forward to support the same interpretation of human guilt for the crime of the Titans, but on examination each appears unconvincing. I shall deal briefly with each in turn:

(i) Pindar, *Olympian 2*: ἀπάλαμνοι φρένες, 'lawless' or 'resourceless' minds, pay a penalty (ποινὰς ἔτεισαν) immediately on dying; sins done on earth are judged in Hades (*O.* 2.57-60).¹²³ The ancient scholia do not agree whether this is a hendiadys, in which case the penalty is the same as the judgement, or whether there are two groups involved and metempsychosis, with the penalty being paid on earth for sins of the dead, while sin on earth is judged below. Pindar does go on to speak of metempsychosis shortly afterwards (*O.* 2.68-70). Whichever of the two is the case, the guilt is not ancestral but belongs to the person paying the penalty, whether it is incurred in the present or a previous existence.

¹²³ Bernabé 2007b: 163; Willcock 1995 *ad loc.*

(ii) Plato, *Cratylus*: the Orphics (οἱ ἄμφι Ὀρφέα) call the body the tomb of the soul (a pun on σῶμα and σῆμα) and like a prison; the soul is punished for that for which it must be punished (ὥς δίκην διδούσης τῆς ψυχῆς ὧν δὴ ἔνεκα δίδωσιν) (*Cra.* 400c).¹²⁴ There is a similar statement in *Phaedo* 62b. It is not said why the soul is being punished, but the punishment is clearly normal human life, so the fault must either be that of ancestors or something incurred in a previous existence.

(iii) Xenocrates: the prison Plato refers to in (ii) is Titanic (fr. 20 Heinze).¹²⁵ While this might be seen as referring to a primal guilt descended from the Titans, saying that the prison is Titanic would be an odd way of expressing this. Xenocrates believed the Titans were a species of daimon, which would not accord with the myth of their destruction. It seems likely that he just means that the prison was as secure as that of the Titans in Tartarus (*Theog.* 717-814).

¹²⁴ Linforth 1941: 147-8; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 107; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011: 80.

¹²⁵ West 1983: 21-2; Parker 1995: 496.

(iv) Plato, *Republic*: (a) travelling priests offer to expiate any misdeed of a man or his ancestors (364c); (b) terrible things await after death those who do not sacrifice according to the appropriate rites (365a).¹²⁶ (b) might imply that everyone has inherited some primal guilt, or it might refer back to (a), tacitly assuming that everyone or his ancestors must be guilty of something, or it might not have an implication of guilt at all.

(v) Plato, *Phaedrus*: diseases and great troubles have fallen on families through ancient guilt (παλαιῶν ἐκ μηνιμάτων) (*Phdr.* 244d).¹²⁷ The reference to families makes it clear that the guilt is that of their human ancestors.

(vi) Aristotle: the ancients say that the soul is paying retribution (διδόναι τὴν ψυχὴν τιμωρίαν) and that we are alive in order to be punished for certain great faults (ζῆν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ κολάσει μεγάλων τινῶν ἀμαρτημάτων) (fr. 60 Rose

¹²⁶ Linforth 1941:75-85.

¹²⁷ Burkert 1983: 116.

= lambl., *Protr.* 47.25-48.1 = OF430vB).¹²⁸ This is probably the idea of the body as a prison or tomb held by οἱ ἄμφι Ὀρφέα in (ii) above; again, the punishment is living in this world, but the faults are not specified.

(vii) Gold leaves from Thurii, fourth century BC: the soul of the deceased comes to Persephone having paid the penalty for unjust deeds (ποινὰν δ' ἀνταπέτεισ' ἔργων ἔνεκα οὐτι δικαίων) (A2=A3.4).¹²⁹ Clearly, then, the penalty was paid before death. It might refer to initiation, or it might refer, as suggested for the earlier examples, to living in this world and the cycle of reincarnation. Once again we are given no clue to what the unjust deeds might have been: one's own, one's ancestors or some kind of primal guilt are all possible. The soul, however, also claims to Persephone that it is of her blessed race (ὕμῶν γένος εὖχομαι ὀλβιον εἶναι, A2=A3.3), clearly put forward as a recommendation, which seems to rule out descent from the guilty Titans.

¹²⁸ Text at Hutchinson and Johnson 2013; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 107; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011: 81.

¹²⁹ Zuntz 1971: 312-13; Seaford 1986: 5-6; Parker 1995: 496; Bernabé 2007b: 163; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 105-9; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011: 79-80.

(viii) Gold leaves from Pelinna, third century BC: the soul of the deceased is instructed to tell Persephone that Bacchios himself has freed it (Βάκχιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε) (D1=D2.2).¹³⁰ This is usually read in conjunction with an Orphic fragment preserved by Olympiodorus, which says that Dionysus is called Lusios, as he has power over (τοῖσιν ἔχων κράτος) lawless ancestors (προγόνων ἀθεμίστων) and can release men from harsh suffering and boundless frenzy (OF350B = OF232K). The gold leaves presumably refer to a Dionysiac initiation. The Olympiodorus fragment does bring Dionysus for once into contact with ancestral guilt, but it is difficult to see how this could refer to the Titans. As they have been destroyed, in what sense could he have power over them? There is no reason why ordinary human ancestors should not be meant.

¹³⁰ Graf 1991: 89-91; Graf 1993: 243-4; Parker 1995: 498; Edmonds 1999: 54-5; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 66-76; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011: 79-81.

(ix) The Gurôb Papyrus, third century BC: penalty fath[ers] (ποινας πατε)
 (P. Gurôb 1 i.4).¹³¹ The papyrus is fragmentary and seems to be an Egyptian combination of elements of various cults. At the end it mentions toys and a mirror (i.29-30), which may be a reference to the toys the Titans used to decoy Dionysus, but this is far from certain. West's supplement of πατε to πατέ[ρων ἀθεμίστον, though often accepted, is based only on the supposed analogy with the fragment from Olympiodorus quoted above. What we actually have is a mention of a penalty in connection with ancestors, and beyond that we cannot go.

To sum up the results of this survey of the evidence, there is nothing whatsoever about the Titans' murder of Dionysus or of humanity inheriting guilt from them. The references to a Titanic prison (iii) and Bacchios freeing the soul (viii) do not seem connected with this, and they are the only mentions of Dionysus or the Titans here. We have, however, seen a number

¹³¹ Text and commentary in Hordern 2000; see also West 1983: 170-1, Henrichs 2003: 233-5, Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 106, Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011: 80, Graf and Johnston 2013: 150-5, 217-18 (translation).

of allusions to humans undergoing punishment during life on earth, with the body as a prison, which may also refer to the cycle of reincarnation. The unjust deeds for which this punishment is incurred must therefore have taken place before birth, possibly committed in a previous incarnation, but in at least two cases, the ancient guilt falling on families in *Phaedrus* (v) and the ancestral penalty in the Gurôb Papyrus (ix), apparently also by ancestors.

Who could these ancestors be if not the Titans? The simple answer is that they were the normal human ones. The idea that guilt could be inherited by descendants was common in Greece.¹³² It is widespread in mythology, but also prevalent in ordinary life. Punishment will fall on your descendants, warns Solon (ἀναίτιοι ἔργα τίνουσιν ἢ παῖδες τούτων ἢ γένος ἐξοπίσω, fr. 1.31). Plato tells of travelling priests who can expiate wrongs done both by their clients and their ancestors (ἀδίκημά του γέγονεν αὐτοῦ ἢ προγόνων, *Rep.*364c). The hereditary curse of the Alcmaeonids (Hdt. 5.70-2) played a significant part in Athenian politics.

¹³² Edmonds 2004: 71-3.

To return, finally, to the Derveni Papyrus, we found there the magi performing incantations to drive away the hindering daimons. ‘The magi make the sacrifice for this reason, just as if paying a penalty’ (τὴν θυσ[ί]αν τούτου ἔνεκε[ν] π[οιοῦσ]ι[ν] // οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὥσπερ εἰ ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες, VI.4-5). I believe we have now established that, whatever may have been the case at the time of the *Orphic rhapsodies* centuries later, there was no concept of primal guilt stemming from the crime of the Titans current at the time the Derveni author wrote, and that the suggestion of Bernabé that this passage refers to the myth is wrong.

There is a further question as to whether the word ποινή is used in the same sense as in the other texts we have examined. To recap, we found ποινή in Pindar fr. 133, where it most plausibly referred to the cycle of reincarnation, in *Olympian 2*, where it may mean punishment after death, imprisonment in the body in life or the cycle of reincarnation, in the gold leaves from Thurii, where the last two meanings are also likely, and in the Gurôb Papyrus,

where it might mean anything. There is of course no reason why it should have the same reference in all these places; the word originally meant ‘blood money’, but its use had widened from this to any kind of penalty or requital.¹³³

It should be clear that the word cannot bear the same meaning in our text as in the other sources we have examined. It is not even an actual ποινή, but ‘as if’, ὡσπερεί, one. It is a sacrifice following incantations, not imprisonment in the body or the cycle of reincarnation. If we can identify to whom it is paid, it must be to the hindering daimons just mentioned,¹³⁴ of whom there is no trace in the other sources. The word might be better translated ‘recompense’ or ‘redemption’ (*LSJ s.v.* 3, 4), what is due to the daimons. As well as rejecting Bernabé’s link of ποινή to the Titans, we must also reject Most’s link to ποινή in the gold leaves.¹³⁵

¹³³ *LSJ s.v.*; KPT *ad loc.*

¹³⁴ Johnston 1999: 138, suggesting it is to atone for their deaths, which I do not follow.

¹³⁵ Most 1997: 131-2; see also Parker 1995: 496.

This might seem a disappointingly negative conclusion to a laborious investigation, but I think it establishes something important. It is often assumed, tacitly if not explicitly, that anything 'Orphic' must be part of a single conceptual world, that the Orphic Derveni Papyrus, the Orphic gold leaves, the Orphics quoted by Plato and the Orphics quoted by Olympiodorus must all be different aspects of the same thing. I think we should now be beginning to see that the world of daimons and Erinyes in the papyrus is not the same as that of the summoning before Persephone in the gold leaves or the imprisonment in the body of οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα or the primal guilt of Olympiodorus.

We need now to examine the role of those who seem to be responsible for our human contact with this world, the magi.

5

The magi

So far, I have been discussing what is being done, and why. In this chapter I shall be looking at who might be performing these activities, and examining the nature of the practitioners of these religious acts, the priests of this religion, how they relate to each other, and what position they might hold in society. Some of them are given a specific name: they are called magi.

The activities of the magi are described in column VI. They drive away the hindering daimons with incantations or sacrifices. They make libations of water and milk, and offer many-knobbed cakes. They make preliminary sacrifices to the Eumenides. In column XX we have more references to religious practitioners. Some perform rites in the cities, while others who profess themselves skilled in religion perform rites for a fee, unfortunately leaving their clients as ignorant as they were before. This raises many

questions. Are these groups the same? Are the magi Persian or Greek?

Does the author approve of them? Is he one himself?

μάγοι originally denoted the priestly Median tribe, who performed the daily fire worship, and appear in Herodotus chanting theogonies at sacrifices (1.132), killing animals (1.140), making libations of wine (7.43), quelling storms with spells (γόησι) (7.191) and interpreting dreams (1.107, 7.19) and portents (7.37).¹³⁶ They are mentioned in this sense as religious experts in Xenophon (οἱ περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τεχνῖται, *Cyr.* 8.3.11) and the Platonic *First Alcibiades* (122a).¹³⁷

A very different type of magus, however, appears in a fragment of Heraclitus, where they are grouped with night-wanderers, bacchants, maenads and initiates (νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις, DK22B14).¹³⁸ This is odd company for a respectable Persian priest, but the use of the term in a

¹³⁶ Nock 1972: 308-9. There are good surveys of the use of the term in Graf 1997: 20-35 and Bremmer 1999.

¹³⁷ Graf 1997: 20.

¹³⁸ Considered authentic by Graf 1997: 21, Bremmer 1999: 2-3; Calvo Martinez 2007:306-8, however, thinks μάγοις an interpolation.

pejorative sense is amply attested in subsequent literature. In Sophocles, Oedipus insults Tiresias as a magus and plotter (μάγον τοιόνδε μηχανοπράφον, *OT* 387),¹³⁹ while in Euripides Helen disappears through the tricks of magi (μάγων τέχναισιν, *Or.* 1497-8), Iphigeneia is described as singing barbarous songs like a magus (μαγεύουσ', *IT* 1337), and magic spells (μαγεύμασι, *Supp.* 1110) are used to try and prolong life.¹⁴⁰ There are also derogatory references in Gorgias (*Hel.* 10), Aeschines (3.137) and Plato (*Rep.* 572e, *Plt.* 280e), as well as in the Hippocratic writings (*Morb. Sacr.* 2), which I shall return to later.¹⁴¹

By contrast, uses of μάγος in a positive sense are difficult to find, apart from the Persian priests. Kingsley sees Empedocles as a magus,¹⁴² but he does not seem to have described himself by that term. The authors of later magical papyri might sometimes call themselves magi, but that was a

¹³⁹ Graf 1997: 22.

¹⁴⁰ Graf 1997: 24; Bremmer 1999: 4.

¹⁴¹ Graf 1997: 22-6; Bremmer 1999: 4.

¹⁴² Kingsley 1995: 217-32.

specialist area.¹⁴³ The apparently positive use in a Greek context in the Derveni Papyrus is therefore surprising.

There has not been general agreement on the solution to this problem.

Tsantsanoglou argues that they are Iranians, on the grounds that the term is never used of Greeks except pejoratively; even if they were an unattested class of Greek magi, they would, he believes, have imported Iranian beliefs and practices and so be much the same thing.¹⁴⁴ Calvo Martínez agrees they are Persian, but maintains they are just put forward as examples who behave in a parallel way to the initiates who sacrifice to the Eumenides.¹⁴⁵ Jourdan, though she suggests the author may be exploiting the ambiguity and playing with both meanings, the respected Persians and the Greek charlatans, thinks that his attitude towards the magi is in fact negative; the conjunction *ὥσπερ*, 'as if', in VI.5 implies they are not really doing what they pretend to do.¹⁴⁶ Janko, in line with his rationalist view of the Derveni

¹⁴³ Nock 1972: 318.

¹⁴⁴ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 110n25.

¹⁴⁵ Calvo Martínez 2007: 310-13.

¹⁴⁶ Jourdan 2003: 38.

author's motives, also believes him to be criticising the magi, whether Persian or Greek, though he favours the latter.¹⁴⁷ Edmonds, on the other hand, thinks them Greek and presented in a positive light as experts, though not as expert as the author himself.¹⁴⁸

In answering the question, it will be useful to widen the investigation from the specific term, magus, and look at other religious practitioners, known by a variety of names. Homer is familiar with a class of travelling workmen (δημιοεργοί) who might include bards, doctors and builders, but also prophets (μάντιν) (*Od.* 17.383-4).¹⁴⁹ Philochorus in the fourth century BC, who may have actually known the Derveni text,¹⁵⁰ was a professional mantis who wrote a treatise on the art (Περὶ μαντικῆς).¹⁵¹ They appear in a much-quoted passage from Plato: 'begging priests and prophets go to the doors of the rich' (ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντις ἐπὶ πλουσίων θύρας ἰόντες, *Rep.* 364b), persuading them that by sacrifices and incantations they can expiate their

¹⁴⁷ Janko 2008: 47.

¹⁴⁸ Edmonds 2008: 35.

¹⁴⁹ Burkert 1983: 115.

¹⁵⁰ Obbink 1997: 49n16 suggests this.

¹⁵¹ Betegh 2004: 359-60.

wrongdoing and that of their ancestors; they also offer spells to harm enemies.¹⁵² ἀγύρτης is derived from ἀγείρειν, 'to collect', in the sense of someone who collects money, originally for a god or goddess, but often later just as a beggar, hence the usual translation of 'begging priests'.¹⁵³

The superstitious man of Theophrastus (*Char.* 16) makes considerable use of religious experts: he consults an exegete (τὸν ἐξηγητὴν), probably a private practitioner rather than the official exegete (16.6), and either a mantis, an augur (ὀρνιθοσκόπος) or a dream interpreter (ὀνειροκρίτης) about his dreams (16.11).¹⁵⁴ Each month he visits an Orphic priest or initiator (Ὀρφεοτελεστής) (16.12); the Orphic prefix may just mean that Orpheus was supposed to have originated the initiatory rites, as was commonly the case.¹⁵⁵ Strabo also speaks of practitioners of Dionysiac and Orphic crafts

¹⁵² Linforth 1941: 89-91; Burkert 1982: 4-6; West 1983: 21; Graf 1997: 22-3.

¹⁵³ Fraenkel 1950 *ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 1273; Graf 1997: 27-8.

¹⁵⁴ Ussher 1993 *ad locc.*

¹⁵⁵ Linforth 1941: 101-4.

(τὰς Διονυσιακὰς τέχνας καὶ τὰς Ὀρφικάς, 10.3.23) in connection with divination (μαντικῆς) and begging priests (τὸ ἀγυρτικὸν).¹⁵⁶

We have now built up a picture of a class of people who provide religious services for money. ἀγύρται, μάντις and so on may be different names for the same thing, or may reflect different specialisms, but their frequent linking together suggest that to most observers they were all quite similar. They were peripatetic and ranked with craftsmen who practised a τέχνη or craft, like builders or doctors.

In this connection there is an especially revealing passage in the Hippocratic treatise *On the sacred disease*. The author, arguing that epilepsy is just a normal disease like any other, says its alleged sacred character was given to it by such people as magi, purifiers, begging priests and rogues now are (τοιοῦτοι εἶναι ἄνθρωποι οἱ καὶ νῦν εἰσι μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται καὶ

¹⁵⁶ Burkert 1982: 5-6; Obbink 1997: 46-7.

ἀλαζόνες, *Morb. Sacr.* 2).¹⁵⁷ The magi are here firmly grouped with the other marginal and dubious religious practitioners. The author goes into some detail as to the remedies they recommend and their techniques of divination, purification and incantation, of all of which he is extremely scornful. What we have here, in fact, is a competition between one craft group, the doctors, and another, who may be called μάγοι, μάντεις or ἀγύρται, over who should practise in one particular area.¹⁵⁸

To return to the Derveni Papyrus, in column XX we have two groups of religious practitioners. Some men are initiated in the cities (ἀνθρώπων ἐν πόλεσιν ἐπιτελέσαντες [τὰ ἱερὰ εἶδον, XX.1), which implies initiators.¹⁵⁹ The author is not surprised that they go away without really understanding what they have experienced (XX.2-3). He is, however, surprised that the same is true of those who pay in advance (τὴν δαπάνην προανηλώσθαι, XX.9) to receive the rites from those who make a craft of the sacred (τοῦ τέχνην

¹⁵⁷ Graf 1997: 30-2; Bremmer 1999: 3; Betegh 2004:350-5.

¹⁵⁸ Betegh 2004: 351-4.

¹⁵⁹ Ὁν ὁρᾷν τὰ ἱερὰ as 'to be initiated' see KPT *ad loc.*

ποιουμένου τὰ ἱερά, XX.3-4). The first group of initiators are clearly part of the polis religion, such as the priests of the Eleusinian mysteries. The second must be the class of private practitioners that we have just identified.

The magi in column VI make sacrifices, incantations and libations. It seems obvious they are not part of the official polis religion. Nothing, however, suggests that, as Tsantsanoglou believes,¹⁶⁰ they are Persians, coming from far away, speaking another language and engaged in the hereditary practice of an alien religion of fire sacrifice. We have seen that magi have several times been grouped with the other private religious practitioners. It is therefore reasonable to assume that they too are part of this class. Whether they are a sub-group within it, or whether μάγοι are just a synonym for μάντεις or ἀγύρται we do not have enough information to decide. Apart from the present text, the testimonies are all more or less hostile and not likely to make fine distinctions.

¹⁶⁰ Tsantsanoglou 1997: 110n25.

I should finally like to consider the relation of the Derveni author himself to this group. He states clearly that the Eumenides are souls (VI.9-10) and that incantations are effective against hindering daimons, so he is a believer in a world of divine or semi-divine beings. I do not think this is compatible with the views of Laks and Janko that he is a rationalist concerned to explain away superstition.¹⁶¹ I have argued above (Chapter 2) that his reference to visiting oracles in V.4 (αὐτοῖς πάριμεν [εἰς τὸ μα]ντεῖον ἐπερ[ω]τήσ[οντες,]) may refer to accompanying consultants rather than to consulting on their behalf, but in either case it is reasonable to assume that some expertise in their interpretation is being claimed. He asks what examples would convince those who do not know dreams or the other things (οὐ γίνωσ[κοντες ἐ]νύπνια // οὐδε τῶν ἄλλων πραγμάτων ἕκαστ[ον,], V.6-7). There is a clear implication that he, unlike them, knows how to interpret dreams and other portents.¹⁶²

Someone who can speak authoritatively about the world below and can interpret oracles and dreams falls squarely within the class of private

¹⁶¹ Laks 1997: 125-6; Janko 2001: 2.

¹⁶² Tsantsanoglou 1997: 98-9; Hussey 1999: 317-18.

religious practitioners that we have been discussing. Is he one of the magi himself, or does he make a distinction between himself and them? His references to them are all in the third person.¹⁶³ On the other hand, it is difficult to believe he is being critical of them.¹⁶⁴ He does not offer any explicit criticism, though this is not from politeness or reticence, as elsewhere he is scathing about those overcome by error and pleasure (V.8-9) or who remain in pitiful ignorance (XX.8-9).

His criticisms are directed at those practitioners in column XX who do not explain what they are doing, and let their clients go before they have learnt (ἐπι- // τελέσαντες πρὶν εἰδέναι, XX.6-7). They lose their γνώμη (XX.10), perhaps here 'purpose',¹⁶⁵ and ἐλπίς (XX.12), 'hope'. Similarly in column V it is ignorance that is the enemy: 'disbelief and ignorance are the same thing' (ἀ[πι]στίη δὲ κάμα[θή] ταυτόν, V.10). We could usefully compare here some priests and priestesses referred to by Plato, who teach a doctrine of

¹⁶³ Most 1997: 120.

¹⁶⁴ *Contra*, Kouremenos in KPT: 53-4.

¹⁶⁵ KPT *ad loc.*

metempsychosis and are concerned, like the Derveni author, to explain what they are doing (οἱ μὲν λέγοντές εἰσι τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερειῶν ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἷσις τ' εἶναι διδόναι, *Men.* 81a-b, introducing the quotation from Pindar, fr. 133, discussed in the previous chapter).¹⁶⁶ The author's emphasis on explanation is exemplified in the rest of his text, where he expounds at some length what he conceives to be the true meaning of the theogony.

The magi, then, are private religious practitioners who work for a fee. The Derveni author, whether he would actually call himself a magus or not, is also one of these. The unusually positive view of the magi is simply due to this being the only surviving text from one of the group themselves. He is, however, critical of the standards of many of his colleagues, who perform the rites but do not give the participants any understanding of what is being done. Just as in the Hippocratic corpus doctors argue for their own methods

¹⁶⁶ Kingsley 1995: 161; Kahn 1997: 55; West 1997:83; KPT: 46-7.

against rival professionals, so here the Derveni author is arguing for his superiority over rival professionals engaged on the same enterprise.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Betegh 2004: 353-6, whose conclusions I essentially follow here; Edmonds 2008: 32; see also Burkert 1982 on religious craft groups.

6

Orphism

The two occurrences of the name Orpheus in the Derveni Papyrus are both in column XVIII. Orpheus called breath Moira (XVIII.2) and he called thought Moira (XVIII.6). This is part of the commentary on the old theogony, and it is difficult to interpret it in any other way but that the commentator believed Orpheus to have written that theogony. There is nothing surprising about this: Orpheus was credited with a wide range of mythological and religious poems.¹⁶⁸ Can we, however, proceed from this to say that the religious practices the Derveni author was describing were Orphic, and the audience which he was addressing formed part of an Orphic sect?

Certainly, some scholars have thought that this may have been the case.

West believes 'the Derveni writer links the ritual of the (Orphic) initiates with

¹⁶⁸ Linforth 1941: 104-64; West 1983: 1-38.

that of the μάγοι, speaking as if the wisdom of the μάγοι guaranteed the validity of Orphic ritual'.¹⁶⁹ With a different emphasis, Most sees an essential similarity with the funerary gold leaves, which he regards as either Orphic or Bacchic.¹⁷⁰ Betegh thinks it very possible that 'the "initiates" of column 6 of the papyrus belong to an Orphic/Dionysiac cult'.¹⁷¹ Graf too holds that the initiates, if not Eleusinian, 'must be Bacchic, "Orphic"'.¹⁷² Janko thinks the initiations described in column XX certainly Orphic.¹⁷³ There is, then, a widespread scholarly assumption that there is an Orphic group and cult to which these people probably belong.

The term 'Orphics' (Ὀρφικοί) can have a number of different meanings. Burkert distinguishes three.¹⁷⁴ First, they can signify the authors of Orphic books. The first recorded use of the term in this sense is not until after the first century AD, where a passage included in Apollodorus recounts that Asclepius raised Hymenaeus from the dead 'as the Orphics say' (ὥς οἱ

¹⁶⁹ West 1997: 90.

¹⁷⁰ Most 1997: 131.

¹⁷¹ Betegh 2004: 81.

¹⁷² Graf and Johnston 2013: 149.

¹⁷³ Janko 2008: 37.

¹⁷⁴ Burkert 1982: 3-4; Alderink 1981: 17-18 lists twelve possibilities.

Ὀρφικοί λέγουσι, 3.10.3).¹⁷⁵ However, the periphrasis of Plato, ‘those around Orpheus’ (οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα, *Prt.* 316d, *Cra.* 400c), who write religious and prophetic works, might be considered equivalent. The content of these works appears from what survives to have been miscellaneous and inconsistent.¹⁷⁶ In West’s formulation, ‘a poem becomes Orphic simply by being ascribed to Orpheus’.¹⁷⁷ This cannot help us in identifying a sect.

Secondly, Ὀρφικοί also appear in a fragment ascribed to Achilles Tatius in about the second century AD, who speaks of them performing Orphic mysteries (οἱ τὰ Ὀρφικά μυστήρια τελοῦντες, fr. 70).¹⁷⁸ Again, we may consider the earlier isolated use of Ὀρφεοτελεστής, ‘Orphic initiator’, who was visited by the superstitious man of Theophrastus (*Char.* 16.12), referred to in the last chapter, as an equivalent to this sense of Ὀρφικοί. It need not, however, imply initiation into specifically Orphic mysteries. The foundation of many types of mysteries, including those of Eleusis, was ascribed to

¹⁷⁵ It appears to be an interpolation: Hard 1997: 173-4. For later references see Linforth 1941: 276-89.

¹⁷⁶ Linforth 1941: 172-3.

¹⁷⁷ West 1983: 3.

¹⁷⁸ Linforth 1941: 225, 277; Burkert 1982: 4.

Orpheus.¹⁷⁹ ‘Orpheus introduced the mysteries to us’ says Aristophanes (Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετάς θ’ ἡμῖν κατέδειξε, *Frogs* 1032), and similarly in the *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides, μυστήριων ... ἔδειξεν Ὀρφεύς (943-4), where it seems Eleusis is meant.¹⁸⁰ We may therefore here have just a synonym for ‘initiator’, rather than anything indicating a contemporary Orphic cult.

So far, our references to ‘Orphics’ have been much later than our text, and do not in any case imply any kind of community, which is the third sense identified by Burkert. Here, though our examples are more contemporary, none are certain.

Herodotus, in his description of Egyptian customs, says that they cannot enter the temples or be buried in woollen clothing, adding ὁμολογέουσι δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Βακχικοῖσι (2.81), though he remarks that these should really be called Egyptian and Pythagorean, not Orphic and Bacchic. This can either be translated ‘they agree in this with the so-called

¹⁷⁹ Linforth 1941: 101-4.

¹⁸⁰ Liapis 2012 *ad loc.*

Orphics and Bacchics', thus referring to some people called Orphics, or it may mean 'they agree in this with the so-called Orphic and Bacchic rites'. In either case, Orphics and Bacchics may refer to two different communities, or rites, or may be meant as synonyms, in which case the 'so-called' (καλεομένοισι) may mean that 'Orphic' is a loose term for what are really Bacchic. Herodotus does go on in the same sentence to refer to 'these rites' (τοῦτων τῶν ὀργίων), which suggests that it is rites to which he is referring, not people.¹⁸¹ All we can be certain of is that there were at least some rites that could be called Orphic, but, as indicated above, this could apply to any rites supposed to have been founded by Orpheus.

Roughly contemporary with Herodotus are three fifth century bone plaques found at Olbia, a Greek colony on the north coast of the Black Sea.¹⁸² Graffiti crudely scratched on them include the name Dionysus several times, the words 'life death life' (βίος θάνατος βίος), possibly a reference to

¹⁸¹ There is a long discussion in Linforth 1941: 38-50, including a consideration of the differences between the Florentine and Roman manuscripts, into which I do not propose to enter.

¹⁸² West 1982; Zhmud' 1992. Sketch, text and translation in Graf and Johnston 2013: 214-2.

metempsychosis,¹⁸³ and the letters ΟΡΦΙΚΟ, which may be what remains of 'Ορφικοί, 'Orphics'.¹⁸⁴ This could well be a group of people called Orphics.

We know from Herodotus (4.79) that there was an active cult of Dionysus in the area, so, coupled with the references on the plaques to Dionysus, it is plausible that this was a local name for the followers of that cult. Olbia, however, is a long way from Derveni, and we know nothing else in common between the cult practices, so it is difficult to extrapolate from one to the other. A group of Orphics at Olbia need not imply groups of Orphics elsewhere with similar beliefs and practices.

'Orphic' is used as an adjective by Plato, in the *Laws*, when he describes those who do not eat animals as living what is called an Orphic life ('Ορφικοί τινες λεγόμενοι βίοι, 782c).¹⁸⁵ There are other references which seem to connect Orphism with vegetarianism. Theseus in Euripides taunts Hippolytus with following Orpheus and abstaining from meat (*Hipp.* 953-4),

¹⁸³ Zhmud' 1992: 169.

¹⁸⁴ The last letter is unclear: West 1982: 21-2.

¹⁸⁵ Linforth 1941: 97-8.

though he may be confusing different cults here,¹⁸⁶ and Aeschylus in Aristophanes commends Orpheus for leading men away from bloodshed (*Frogs* 1032), though he perhaps means a more peaceful civilisation rather than diet.¹⁸⁷ We do not know if we are dealing with individual preferences or organised groups.

To sum up, the main evidence for an Orphic cult at the time of the Derveni Papyrus is as follows: (i) a single mention of Orphic initiators, who may belong to an Orphic cult, or to any cult at all, (ii) a reference by Herodotus which probably implies that Bacchic rites could also be called Orphic, (iii) a graffito which might signify that followers of the Dionysiac cult at Olbia called themselves Orphics, (iv) a statement by Plato that vegetarians followed an Orphic way of life.

According to sociologists of religion, a sect is normally defined by some or all of the following characteristics: a minority group, with an alternative lifestyle,

¹⁸⁶ Cole 1980: 228.

¹⁸⁷ Dover 1993 *ad loc.*

regular meetings, communal property, agreement on beliefs and practices, based on authority, with a primary reference system of 'us' versus 'them', taking action on apostates, with diachronic stability but local mobility.¹⁸⁸ It should be obvious that the evidence we have for an Orphic cult falls very far short of these criteria. The only solid conclusion we can reach is that followers of Dionysus, initiators into the mysteries and vegetarians were occasionally called Orphic.

Nor is there any mention of Orpheus in the papyrus, apart from his authorship of the theogony, and though some kind of initiates are mentioned, there is none of vegetarianism or Dionysus at all. We do not know what the author and addressees of the Derveni Papyrus would call themselves, but there is no reason to suppose it would be Orphics.

¹⁸⁸ Burkert 1982: 3.

There has been a continuing debate over the last hundred years on the nature and even the existence of Orphism.¹⁸⁹ The idea of an Orphic religion, as once put forward by scholars such as Rohde, Harrison and Guthrie, may not now be accepted, but its influence still remains.¹⁹⁰ According to Graf, 'most contemporary scholars seem again to lean toward a maximalist definition of Orphism'.¹⁹¹ It will be clear, from this chapter and also from Chapter 4, that I am not conforming to this scholarly trend, but rather following in the sceptical, minimalist tradition of Linforth and Edmonds.¹⁹² There may sometimes be a heuristic value in a maximalist position, in trying to see if connections could exist between the disparate phenomena that have been connected with Orphism, but I believe it is also important to approach the evidence in each case without prior assumptions and only to accept what the evidence itself seems to entail. I hope I have demonstrated that in the case of the Derveni Papyrus there is nothing to show that it had any connection with any Orphic movement, if such a thing existed.

¹⁸⁹ Graf and Johnston 2013: 50-65, in relation to the gold leaves.

¹⁹⁰ Rohde 1925: 335-61; Harrison 1922: 454-658; Guthrie 1952: 204-7; Edmonds 2008: 19-23.

¹⁹¹ Graf and Johnston 2013: 65.

¹⁹² Linforth 1941; Edmonds 1999.

7

An initiation cult

Before drawing a conclusion from all this, I should first like to recapitulate what we have learnt in the preceding chapters:

Ritual and belief

There are libations made, wineless and chthonic (*choa*), apparently in drops, apparently to the Erinyes or Eumenides. Also offered are many-knobbed cakes, and there seem to be hymns or incantations with music. Divine messages are received by the consultation of oracles and the interpretation of dreams and other signs. It is not clear how far all this is secret, or only to be understood by a privileged group. There is no sign of a requirement to lead an especially pure or righteous life, or of any dietary restrictions. Nor is there much evidence that written books played a part in the ritual.

Daimons, Erinyes, Eumenides and souls

The souls referred to are the dead. The Eumenides are also the dead, and are the same as the Erinyes. The Erinyes are the same as the hindering daimons. The Erinyes need to be appeased by sacrifices and incantations. There is a concern for justice and the punishment of the unjust. The Erinyes were probably not the souls of initiates. The daimons were not the personal daimons of living individuals. We are therefore concerned with vengeful and hindering souls of the dead, also known as daimons, Erinyes and Eumenides, who seem concerned for justice and the punishment of the unjust, and need to be appeased with incantations and sacrifices.

Original sin

The *πρόν* of the text has nothing to do with the supposed Orphic doctrine of human guilt inherited from the Titans, but is a recompense paid to the hindering daimons, that is to say, just the incantations and sacrifices referred to above.

Magi

The magi who perform these rites are private religious practitioners who work for a fee, and the Derveni author is also one of these, though he claims higher standards than his colleagues.

Orphism

It is doubtful that any Orphic sect existed at the time, and there is certainly no sign of it in the papyrus.

It is clear from the references to the terrors of Hades and appeasing the hindering daimons (V.6 and VI.2-3) that the ritual has a concern for the fate of the soul after death. The first thing we have to decide is what are the Erinyes, Eumenides or hindering daimons doing here, as they seem to have no connection with the traditional association of the Erinyes with blood-kin guilt, as I described in Chapter 3, though, as I noted there, they do also have a wider concern with vengeance and justice. I should like to put forward as a

possible key to this a passage of Diogenes Laertius describing the Pythagoreans:

καὶ ἄγεσθαι τὰς μὲν καθαρὰς ἐπὶ τὸν ὕψιστον, τὰς δ' ἀκαθάρτους μὴτ' ἐκείναις πελάζειν μὴτ' ἀλλήλαις, δεῖσθαι δ' ἐν ἀρρήκτοις δεσμοῖς ὑπ' Ἐρινύων. [32] εἶναί τε πάντα τὸν ἀέρα ψυχῶν ἔμπλεων: καὶ ταύτας δαίμονάς τε καὶ ἥρωας ὀνομάζεσθαι: καὶ ὑπὸ τούτων πέμπεσθαι ἀνθρώποις τοὺς τ' ὀνείρους καὶ τὰ σημεῖα νόσου τε καὶ ὑγιείας (D.L. 8.1.31-2) ¹⁹³

[Hermes as psychopomp brings in the souls from their bodies] and leads the *katharas* to the upper regions, but the *akarthartous* are not allowed to approach them or each other, but are bound in unbreakable bonds by the Erinyes. All the air is full of souls, and they are called daimons and heroes and by these are sent to men dreams and signs of disease and health

Here we have the Erinyes in a role not connected with the blood kin group, and one in which they might well be described as hindering daimons. There are also references to souls and daimons which correspond to the Derveni vocabulary, and to prophetic dreams of the type referred to in V.6, which suggest we are in the same conceptual world. καθαρός is sometimes

¹⁹³ Tsantsanoglou 1997:112.

translated as 'pure', but it has a different semantic range from words like ὅσιος or ἁγνός, and often carries the implication of 'purified' or 'cleansed from pollution'.¹⁹⁴ I would suggest that the καθαρὰς and the ἀκαθάρτους whose fate after death is so different might here mean the initiated and uninitiated. It was a leading purpose of initiation to ensure a better fate after death: in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* it is said the initiate will be fortunate (ὄλβιος) after death, but the uninitiate (ἀτελής) ill-fated (ἄμμορος) (*h.Cer.* 480-2). καθαρός is associated with initiation by Plato:

ὅς ἂν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος εἰς Ἅϊδου ἀφίκηται ἐν βορβόρῳ κείσεται, ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἰκήσει (*Phd.* 69c)

[Those who established the mysteries said that] he who comes to Hades uninitiated will lie in filth, but he who comes there purified (*kekatharmenos*) and initiated will dwell with the gods

¹⁹⁴ *LSJ* s.v. I.3; Zuntz 1971: 307.

The term also occurs in the gold leaves (A1-3, A5), where the soul says to Persephone ‘pure I come from the pure’ (ἐρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν καθάρᾳ, A3.1); it may refer to initiation here too.¹⁹⁵

There is little doubt that initiation was involved in the Derveni ritual. Initiates (μύσται, VI.8) sacrifice to the Eumenides. We should be clear that μύσται can mean initiates in any cult, not just public ones like Eleusis:¹⁹⁶ Aeschines’ mother was said to initiate (τελούσῃ) her followers (Dem. 18.259, 19.199), and Plato refers to certain initiations (τελετάς τινας, *Leg.* 815c) which included dancing.¹⁹⁷ We saw in Chapter 5 that initiation was part of the stock in trade of the group we identified as the magi of the papyrus. In column XX, people can either perform certain rites publicly or privately, and it is difficult to say to what this might refer, if not initiation. This is what the phrase ‘see the sacred things’ ([τὰ ἱ]ερὰ εἶδον, XX.1) usually means.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008: 100-102 suggest a combination of vegetarianism and other observances and ritual; Johnston in Graf and Johnston 2013: 121-2 thinks it is initiation, but connects it with the supposed guilt of the Titans.

¹⁹⁶ Cole 1980: 232-3.

¹⁹⁷ Cole 1980: 236-7.

¹⁹⁸ KPT *ad loc.*

We have, however, to reconcile this with the activities described in column VI, where there are χοαί, libations poured into the earth for the dead or the chthonic powers (II.5, VI.7),¹⁹⁹ and incantations or sacrifices to drive away the hindering daimons (VI.2-3), presumably as protection for the soul after death. These have naturally suggested a funerary ritual, as I noted in Chapter 2.²⁰⁰ Several answers are possible. The libations and incantations may have been part of the initiation ritual, though only taking effect later, on the death of the initiate. Otherwise we might suppose a second, funeral, rite taking place for initiates. There is a third possibility. Plato mentions those who have rituals taken from books ascribed to Musaeus and Orpheus, who not only offer them for the living, but also for the dead (τελευτήσασιν), rites they call τελετάς (there seems to be a Platonic pun here), which deliver us from evils in the other world (αἱ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς) (*Rep.* 364e-365a). It may, then, be that two separate things were being offered: initiation, and for those who died having neglected this, a ceremony immediately following death. We do not have sufficient information from our

¹⁹⁹ Burkert 1985: 71.

²⁰⁰ Jourdan 2003 *ad* II.5.

fragmentary text to determine which of these three possibilities may be correct.

What we seem to have, then, is a group of private religious practitioners, sometimes called magi, who are offering initiation ceremonies to give a better fate after death by enabling the soul of the deceased to escape the hindering daimons, also called Erinyes, and pass to the upper regions where they might dwell with the gods. The Erinyes are given their traditional role as servants of Justice, for it is only right that only those who have qualified through initiation should get the benefits to which they are entitled.

This picture of the fate of the soul after death is similar to one later ascribed to the Pythagoreans, but may well have been current more widely.²⁰¹ Connections have sometimes been made between the papyrus and the 'Orphic' gold leaves or Bacchic rites, but the picture we have built up here has little in common with the landscape of cypress and spring and interviews

²⁰¹ Zuntz 1971 saw the funerary gold leaves as Pythagorean, but his position requires modification in the light of later discoveries; Graf and Johnston 2013: 62-3.

with the queen of the underworld that we find in the gold leaves, and if Dionysus was in any way involved there is no clue to this in what we have. There is no sign of a connection with anything called 'Orphism', or with any notion of primal guilt.

The religious milieu of the Derveni Papyrus is therefore that of a private initiation cult designed to procure the initiates a better fate after death. Although many of the details can be disputed, this seems to me to be the most probable interpretation of the text.

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